

Study Finds Changes in Nations' Health Care System Place Daunting New Burdens on 25 Million Unpaid Family Caregivers Who Provide \$194 Billion Worth of Services.

Excerpts...

NEW YORK, June 7, PRNewswire — A new study by the United Hospital Fund on family caregiving concludes that the nation's trillion dollar health care system rests on an invisible fault line vulnerable to collapse.

"Commissioned by the Fund's Families and Health Care Project, the study calls family caregivers the bedrock of our nation's health care system. Unpaid and largely unrecognized, they are the spouses, children, siblings, partners, neighbors, friends or parents who provide essential care to their seriously ill or disabled relatives or friends out of love, duty, obligation or lack of alternatives. Their struggles, individually and collectively, are growing. The revolution in health care financing and delivery, whatever its achievements, has also dramatically shifted many costs and responsibilities to them. And when a caregiver's individual burden becomes too great, it often results in the return of two people to the health care system – the patient and the exhausted caregiver both. Families can be devastated.

These silent, unheralded struggles, the study details, have far-reaching national implications:

- More than 25 million Americans are family caregivers of seriously ill or disabled adults.
- Their work, if it were part of the market economy, would have an economic value of nearly \$200 Billion – equal to 20% of the total for all health care expenditures.
- This figure dwarfs total expenditure for paid home health care (\$30 Billion) and nursing home care (\$79 Billion) combined.

Many of the participants in the focus groups suggest that they could be helped in relatively simple ways: access to information, modest relief on a regular basis [aka "respite care"] to allow them to attend to chores, more support groups..."

(Thanks to Tony Prince of Bankers for bringing this article to our attention)